3rd Edition

Martin Montgomery, Alan Durant, Nigel Fabb, Tom Furniss and Sara Mills

Ways of Reading

Advanced
reading
skills for
students
of English
literature

Ways of Reading

Third Edition

Praise for the second edition:

> 'Thorough, clear, thought-provoking and stimulating, *Ways of Reading* is the best available introduction to literary studies and the issues connected with reading.'
>
> Jean Jacques Weber, *University Centre Luxembourg*

> '*Ways of Reading* is a valuable and immensely usable book . . . Its range of text samples is admirably wide-ranging and eclectic.'
>
> John McRae, *Language and Literature*

Ways of Reading is a well-established core textbook that provides the reader with the tools to analyse and interpret the meanings of literary and non-literary texts.

Six sections, split into self-contained units with their own activities and notes for further reading, cover:

- basic techniques and problem-solving
- language variation
- attributing meaning
- poetic uses of language
- narrative
- media texts.

This third edition has been substantially revised and redesigned throughout with many fresh examples and exercises. References have been updated, the overall organization of the book has changed and new material has been added to include information on electronic sources and the Internet, plus a completely new unit: Ways of Reading drama analyses plays as a dramatic performance and a dramatic text.

Martin Montgomery is Director of the Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies; **Nigel Fabb** is Professor of Literary Linguistics; and **Tom Furniss** is Senior Lecturer in English Studies, all at the University of Strathclyde. **Alan Durant** is Professor of Communication at Middlesex University, London; and **Sara Mills** is Professor in the Department of English Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. The authors have written and edited numerous books on linguistics, communication studies, study skills, literary theory and cultural studies.

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Section 4 Poetic form

Section 5 Narrative

Section 6 Media: from text to performance

Notes on contributors

Alan Durant is Professor of Communication, Middlesex University, London. His books include *How to Write Essays and Dissertations: A Guide for English Literature Students* (co-written with Nigel Fabb, Pearson, 2006), *Literary Studies in Action* (co-written with Nigel Fabb, Routledge, 1990), *How to Write Essays, Dissertations and Theses in Literary Studies* (co-written with Nigel Fabb, Longman, 1993), *Ezra Pound: Identity in Crisis* (Harvester/Barnes & Noble, 1981) and *Conditions of Music* (Macmillan/SUNY, 1984). With Nigel Fabb and others he edited *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature* (Manchester University Press/Routledge, 1987).

Nigel Fabb is Professor of Literary Linguistics in the Department of English Studies at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, where he was recently Head of Department. He is an editor of the *Journal of Linguistics*, and the author of five books, including *Linguistics and Literature: Language in the Verbal Arts of the World* (Blackwell, 1997).

Tom Furniss is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. His books include *Reading Poetry: An Introduction* (2nd edn), co-written with Michael Bath (Longman, 2007).

Sara Mills is Professor in the Department of English Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. Her books include *Feminist Stylistics* (Routledge, 1995), *Discourse* (Routledge, 1997) and *Gender and Politeness* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Martin Montgomery is Reader in Literary Linguistics at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, where he was head of English Studies. He is now Director of the Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies. He is the author of *An Introduction to Language and Society* (Routledge, 1995) and is a contributor to several books and journals.

Preface to third edition

This third edition of *Ways of Reading* has been substantially revised in the light of developments in the field, in the light of our own experience using the book and in the light of feedback from others, both colleagues and students. References have been updated and fresh examples introduced, a new unit has been added and the overall organization of the book has changed.

The central emphasis of the original book – on reading as an active and reflective process – remains. We continue to treat reading as much more than the simple decipherment of words on the page. Instead, *Ways of Reading* is designed to encourage a critical and analytic engagement with text, one in which readers pose questions and attend to details of form and structure in pursuit of understanding. To enable or facilitate this process we have assembled a set of tools for thinking and reading. Many of these 'tools for reading' amount to particular skills of analysis; and this helps to explain the structure of units, each of which moves from exposition of an approach to its application. In this way, the book is not only reader-centred but also student-centred, treating knowledge as a set of procedures for inquiring about and exploring text as much as a set of pre-constituted facts.

The units are grouped into six sections. Section 1 introduces basic techniques and problem-solving. Section 2 presents the dimensions along which language may vary, and gives attention to issues of historical change, gender and social position. Section 3 explores questions of meaning, including modes of indirection such as irony and allusion. It also explores the respective roles of the author and the reader in the process of creating and constraining meaning. Section 4 focuses on the sound patterning and grammar of poetic texts, including ways in which such texts may both achieve an extra layer of patterning and break with normal patterns of linguistic construction. Section 5 is concerned broadly with aspects of narrative – what makes a story and how stories are told. Section 6 addresses the question of translation between one medium and another, from prose fiction to film, and from the page to performance.

Acknowledgements

The book originated in a course in English Studies developed and taught primarily by the then staff of the Programme in Literary Linguistics, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. The original planning team for the course also included Gillian Skirrow and Derek Attridge, and *Ways of Reading* owes much to their inspiration. The title itself derives in part from John Berger's book, *Ways of Seeing*; but there was also a course of the same name (though different in aims, scope and constituency) taught by Deirdre Burton and Tom Davis in the English Department at the University of Birmingham.

In writing the book, the authors benefited a great deal both from the responses of students in workshops and also from postgraduates who assisted in the teaching of many of the units – Shân Wareing, Christine Christie, Lena Garry, Linda Jackson, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Lindsay Hewitt, Luma Al Balaa and others. In addition, we would like to thank Gill Morris and Keith Knightenhelser. Special thanks go to Judit Friedrich and Professor Michael Toolan, who read and commented upon the complete typescript of the book. Its faults, of course, remain our own.

Introduction

Debates about the nature and purpose of English Studies have been common-place since the 1960s and have led to important advances in our ways of understanding the subject. These debates have often been conducted in terms of theoretical critique and analysis; but, alongside such critique, and in the wake of it, there is an important need for materials that can help translate theoretical and analytic insights into practical methods of study, especially for students in the earlier stages of their work. *Ways of Reading* is designed to provide such materials.

Our perspective in *Ways of Reading* is one that places less emphasis on Literature as such and greater emphasis on exploring relationships between literary and other types of text. Examples in this book will be taken from the fields of journalism and advertising, film and television, as well as from the field of Literature as traditionally defined. *Ways of Reading*, then, explores non-literary as well as literary texts, at the same time and in relation to each other. In this respect, our use of the term 'text' may be sometimes puzzling. For one thing, we use it not in the familiar sense of 'set text' – one of the canon of great books. Instead we use it more abstractly to refer to the trace or record of a communicative event, an event that may be performed in words but that may equally take place in images or in a combination of words and images. Therefore, not only do examples discussed in this book come from everyday life as well as from literature, some of them also include a significant visual component.

Important changes of critical emphasis follow from broadening the range of texts that we examine. Although the texts that we use for illustration and discussion tend broadly to be playful or persuasive in character, we do not focus particularly on questions of relative value, or on issues of tradition or influence. We focus instead on what might be called the rhetorical organiza-tion of texts – or how they work to create meanings and produce recognizable effects by means of identifiable techniques, each of which can be described,

analysed and studied. The ability to identify and recognize modes of patterning and rhetorical organization in text is part and parcel for us of ways of reading.

To this end, the book is composed in terms of discrete units, each of which aims at establishing a technique of analysis and interpretation that should prove useful in reading texts, whether they are literary or non-literary, verbal or visual. Each unit not only introduces a concept or technique relevant to critical reading; it is also designed to give crucial practice in its use, by culminating in a concrete activity. These activities at the end of each unit are thus as important as the exposition itself, providing simultaneously a test of the concept's usefulness, and also scope for the reader to extend for him- or herself, in a practical fashion, competence in its application.

Although the units are devoted to discrete topics, they may also be seen as working collectively to furnish tools for use in interpretation. As such, they provide a compendium of critical and analytic strategies to enable critical reading. Critical reading, as we envisage it, examines how texts make sense, what kinds of sense they make, and why they make sense in one way rather another. This is important because – we believe – the rhetoric of texts contributes to the creation and circulation of meanings in society, to the point that we understand the world and our place within it through the texts that we make and interpret. Hence our concern in *Ways of Reading* to relate readings of the text to readings of the world around the reader.

The book is loosely organized into six main sections. Section 1 considers basic techniques and problem-solving, and deals with fundamental starting points for studying text. Section 2 presents a broad picture of the dimensions along which language may vary, including attention to issues of historical change, gender and social position. The units that comprise this second section thus help us to see the range of variation that provides the linguistic backdrop for the particular features and strategies of a specific text. Section 3 considers modes of textual practice, including figurative language, crucial to the production of meaning whether directly or indirectly, by metaphor and irony, or by juxtaposition and allusion. It also explores the respective roles of the author and the reader in the process of creating and constraining meaning. Section 4 focuses on the sound patterning and grammar of poetic texts, including ways in which such texts may both achieve an extra layer of patterning and break with normal patterns of linguistic construction. Section 5 is concerned broadly with aspects of narrative – what makes a story and how stories are told. Section 6 addresses the question of translation and shift between one medium and another, from prose fiction to film, and from the page to performance.

The book is thus structured in terms of certain kinds of progression – from smaller features of texts (e.g. rhyme) to larger features (e.g. story structure); from poetry to prose; or from text to performance. However, we would not wish to make too much of these kinds of progression. Instead, each unit may be seen as adding to a network of concepts; and, because each unit opens out upon others in different parts of the book, the reader will find cross-

references from one unit to another. At the same time, because many of the units can work in a relatively self-standing fashion, it is possible to study or consult them individually without necessarily referring to other parts of the book. In sum, *Ways of Reading* can be used as a class-book; for individual study (working through it topic by topic); or for reference (by consulting the glossary, index or table of contents). In this respect we hope that the book will itself be put to use productively in different ways that nonetheless contribute to its underlying aim: to develop an awareness of reading as a broader process, where reading the word is a part of reading the world.

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